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ABSTRACT

This paper identifies individual and institutional factors which have facilitated or inhibited the achievement of successful black farmers. The information derived from the case studies is used to develop a model which can be used in working effectively with black farmers. The thirteen case studies discussed focus on the following: (1) reasons for choosing farming as an occupation, (2) past farming experiences, (3) acquisition and retention of land, (4) sources for obtaining agricultural credit, (5) present farming operations, (6) participation in farm programs, (7) social and political participation, (8) socioeconomic characteristics of the farmers, and (9) perceptions of the future for blacks in American agriculture. In analyzing the cases of the selected farmers, several common factors emerged. These serve as the framework for the discussion. These factors are: (1) desire to farm, (2) strong work orientation, (3) land as a basis for economic security, (4) managerial skills and commitment to learn, (5) linkages with nonfarm organizations and activities, and (6) family goals and supports. Results indicate that the selected farmers had practical agricultural experience and personal capacity but few material resources when they started out. Their present level of success is in some measure related to their ability to convert assets of one type into assets of another. At least two liabilities stand out, namely generally low levels of formal education and racial discriminatory practices among agricultural agencies and related institutions. (Author/AM)

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SUCCESSFUL BLACK FARMERS: FACTORS IN THEIR ACHIEVEMENT[1]

by

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Introduction

The purpose of this paper is to identify individual and institutional factors which have facilitated or inhibited the achievement of widely dispersed successful Black farmers.

The possibility that there are, or might be, successful Black farmers is overlooked--or concealed--by the emphasis given to (1) the fact that Black-operated farms have come close to vanishing from the American scene, (2) the rapid rate at which Blacks are losing ownership of land, and (3) the dismal prognosis conventionally given for the continued survival of the remaining Black-operated farms, considering the impact which prevailing economic and technological trends and public policies have on the place of small-scale farms in American agriculture.

U.S. Census data and a limited number of studies--mostly census-based--provide ample evidence for a depressing outlook from the standpoint of Blacks wishing to retain farm operator status.[3] The number of Black-operated farms reached a peak of 925,710 in 1920; of these some 98 percent then as now were in the Census South. The loss since has been more pronounced for Black-operated farms than for all farms. By 1969 the number of Black-operated farms had dropped by 90.6 percent to 87,393,[4] compared with a drop of 64.0 percent for all farms in the South and of 57.7 percent for all farms in the nation. The rate of decline for Black-operated farms accelerated after 1950. The percentage loss for successive decades 1920-1930 through 1959-1969 was as follows: 4.6, 22.8, 17.9, 51.3, and 67.9.[5]

Of special interest is the trend for owner-operated units, because there has long been a debate as to whether sharecroppers could properly be considered farm operators comparable to other categories of land tenure. Farms for which the Black operator owned all or part of the land decreased by 70.2 percent between 1920 and 1969,[6] from 234,014 farms to 69,845. Thus, the loss of owner-operated units has not been as precipitous as that for sharecropper and other tenant-operated farms. We may note that the loss of Black-operated farms has been paralleled by a loss of Black rural-farm population from about 5,100,000 in 1920 to an estimated 541,000[7] in 1976 (U.S. Bureau of the Census and Economic Research Service, 1977), only 6.6 percent of the nation's much reduced farm population.

One favorable trend is that the tenure status of the Blacks remaining in farming has improved, if land ownership is used as a test. There has been a shift from a predominance of sharecroppers and other tenants to a predominance and an increasing proportion of owners and part-owners. Taking only the South, in 1920, for instance, 23.6 percent of all nonwhite farmers owned all or part of their land, while 76.2 percent were sharecroppers or in other categories of tenants. By 1969, 79.8 percent owned all or part of their land and only 20.2 percent were tenants of some type. Croppers had become so few that the Census had discontinued using the category. The tenure distribution of nonwhite farmers in 1969 was similar to that of white farmers both in the South and nationally.

The sharp increase in the share of Black farmers who are owners or part-owners has been accompanied, at the same time, by a decrease

in total acreage owned by Blacks according to recent studies (Browne, 1973; Salamon, 1976).[8] Salamon estimates that Blacks lost land ownership at an annual rate of 333,000 acres from 1954 to 1969, to bring the total amount of farm land owned by the operators to less than 6 million acres,[9] undoubtedly well under half of what it once was.

Black-operated farms typically are comparatively small in scale and do not yield sufficient sales of farm products to provide a reasonable living for the family from farm income alone. Although the average size of these farms has trended upward, the 1969 census shows an average in the South of only 78 acres for Black as compared with 303 acres for white-operated farms in the same region. In the mid-1960s the U.S. Department of Agriculture figured as a rule of thumb that a farmer had to sell at least $10,000 worth of products annually to make the net income of $2,500 needed to maintain a minimum decent level of living (Beale, 1966:179). For today's economy these rule-of-thumb figures need to be at least doubled (Lewis, 1976:22). Some 94 percent of all Black-operated farms failed in 1969 to meet the USDA's mid-1960s measure of adequacy, i.e., were reported by the Census of Agriculture as having sales of less than $10,000. In fact, 71 percent had farm product sales over a year's time of less than $2,500. Consequently, the great majority of Black farm operator families are dependent on off-farm income, from employment or other sources, or fall in the federal government's official poverty classification.

Additional factors which have been used to support the usual prognosis for a continued relatively greater decline in the number of Black farmers include (1) their lag in shifting to the enterprises which have been expanding in the South--such as livestock, dairy, and poultry--

away from a specialization in tobacco or cotton and (2) their higher age level.[10]

The Case Studies

Use of aggregate census data alone does not allow one to fully appreciate the experiences, conditions, and kinds of problems that today's Black farmers have had at various stages along the way to their current status. Further, there is little evidence in the literature of systematic studies of successful Black farmers.[11] In preparing a manuscript on "The Black Experience in Agriculture and Rural Life," we therefore decided to make case studies of a limited number of Black farmers perceived as being successful by professionals in agriculture and also by the farmers themselves. We did not provide the professionals (some Black and some white and located in land-grant institutions) with a set of criteria to use in listing the cases from which we made our selections. Rather, we merely emphasized that we wished to interview some "successful Black farmers." Our purpose was twofold: (1) to identify individual and institutional factors and conditions which have contributed to the present levels of success of these farmers and (2) to build on the results to develop a model which could be used in working effectively with Black farmers.

If Black farmers are to have a place in American agriculture, there must be an understanding of the circumstances peculiar to them as a class before effective policies and programs can be formulated and carried out. We sought to extend our understanding through first-hand information about the experience of successful farmers. To achieve this end, the case studies focused on (1) reasons for choosing farming as an occupation, (2) past farming experiences, (3) acquisition and retention

of land, (4) sources for obtaining agricultural credit, (5) present farming operations, (6) participation in farm programs, (7) social and political participation, (8) socioeconomic characteristics of the farmers, and (9) perceptions of the future for Blacks in American agriculture.

To maximize what we could learn from a small number of cases (13 provide the basis for this paper), we sought diversity of experience by selecting farmers in widely dispersed locations, i.e., from one state in the South Atlantic census division, one in the East South Central division, and one in the East North Central. The semi-structured interviews, tape-recorded, were made in summer 1976 (by Minnie M. Brown).

Analysis

In analyzing the cases of the selected farmers, several key common denominators emerged. These serve as a framework for discussing the salient factors related to the success of this special group of Black farmers. These key common denominators are:

1) Desire to farm,
2) Strong work-orientation,
3) Land as a basis for economic security,
4) Managerial skills and commitment to learn,
5) Linkages with nonfarm organizations and activities, and
6) Family goals and supports.

We also discuss the perceptions these farmers have of the differences between successful white farmers and successful Black farmers and their prognosis of the future for Black farmers.

Desire to farm

All of the selected farmers chose farming as an occupation because of desire. The reasons given for their choice varied, however. A composite analysis of the reasons given by this group for wanting to farm is as follows:

1) A desire to be self-sufficient and independent. This was particularly important to those who had at one time been tenants and had lived under the twin yoke of racism and economic peonage. They rejected the old order and wanted to have control over their own lives.
2) The love of farming was inculcated within their frame of reference at a very early age--a yearning for a certain closeness to the earth.
3) Farming was believed to provide a good living and economic security; moreover, farm ownership was thought to give a certain degree of social status in the community.
4) Farming offers job satisfactions not derived from prior nonfarm work experiences.
5) Consequences such as equality of opportunity in farm programs were anticipated. (Here it should be noted that the farmer giving this reason for wanting to farm later learned that one did not always get the anticipated consequences, due to actual practices of certain farm agency programs in his locality.)
6) Certain social determinants undergirded some of the decisions to farm, e.g., their father's occupation was farming. All of the farmers in the case studies were sons of farmers except one whose father was briefly a farm laborer. Thus, fathers had been role models for their sons.

7) Self-concept or some recognition of their own skills and abilities was a strong factor in some of the choices to farm.

8) There was a desire to keep a farm already in the family.

9) Rural living was preferred over urban. (With one exception, all were living in the same county in which they grew up.)

10) Historical circumstances and the financial state of the family were other determinants in the decision to farm.

Thus, a set of interrelated factors entered into the occupational choice of these farmers. Some were expressed singly; some were given in combination with others, with varying degrees of intensity. But all of these Black farmers had a desire to farm, and they chose farming as an occupation because they saw in it the potential for the satisfaction of their needs. Apparently, they are happy with their choice.

Strong work orientation

All of these farmers are positively oriented toward work. They grew up knowing what work was, and they appreciate what they have achieved. To begin with, these particular farmers hold deep beliefs that work is paramount for successful farming. Such attitudes are evident throughout their stories, particularly in their discussions of what it takes to be a successful farmer. These comments are typical:

"When a job needs to be done, it must be done then, rather than put off until tomorrow."

"You've got to be willing to work overtime."

"Hard work, dedication and efficiency are necessary. . . . The Black farmer is going to have to be more dedicated and work twice as hard."

"Lots of hard working hours and a desire to farm.'

"But most Black farmers who are successful did it the hard way. They've worked for it. That's my situation."

These farmers did not have to be coerced into working. Most of them worked themselves out of poverty. Some of them, on their own volition, have held off-farm jobs in addition to their farming. Some do off-farm work now during a slack season. Their positive orientation toward work is further evidenced by the fact that most of them rent farm land in addition to that which they own.

Land as a basis for economic security

All of the selected farmers are landowners. While some inherited small tracts which were later expanded, most of their land was purchased outright by the present owners. More than one-third are on farms or parts of farms which their fathers owned or were in the process of buying. In some instances, the farms were bought by sons whose fathers were about to lose them. All of these farmers are legal owners. All have exclusive possession of their land except two whose farms are jointly owned by brothers and sisters.

These farmers secured mortgage credit in buying their land, with few exceptions. Credit for buying land was obtained within an institutional framework of both public (governmental) and private sources, as described below:

1) Four farmers secured loans from a Federal Land Bank through a local Federal Land Bank Association.[12]

2) Four farmers received loans from the Farmers Home Administration. Two of them in one county, however, had their loans terminated due to difficulty in meeting their mortgage payments because of crop failure and low cotton prices. Subsequently, the two secured loans from local banks and repeated a similar experience. In a final effort, they were able to save their farms by securing loans from the Masonic Lodge, a Black fraternal organization whose credit terms were tailored to their needs and potential to repay.

3) The remaining farmers who obtained loans to pay for their farms borrowed money from private individual lenders, local banks, or credit companies. Local banks, however, were generally reported to be conservative lenders for land purchase.

The high cost of land was a dominant theme expressed by these farmers as being not only a barrier to expanding their farms but also an obstacle to Black would-be entrants into farming. Moreover, some of them indicated that even Blacks who have the money are often unable to buy land to farm due to social customs and the economic and political dominance of whites, who are given first preference in purchasing land. The following comments are expressive of such circumstances:

> "I would have owned more land and would have liked to have bought additional land, but there were a few whites back then who didn't want a colored person buying next to them. . . . Whites will not sell land to Blacks unless it costs a fortune."

"Whites just don't sell land to Blacks. They sell it to other whites. The only way Blacks can get a farm is to buy it from another Black man. That's all we can get."

"If it is a white section, they're not going to let Blacks buy and get in. If they do, they (whites) will raise their prices so high the Blacks couldn't afford to pay for it."

In addition to the high cost of land and racism of whites with respect to selling land to Blacks, these successful Black farmers emphasized the growing problem which Blacks face in securing credit to buy land to farm.

Against many odds, these selected farmers succeeded in becoming owners of modest-size farms ranging from 40 to 290 acres (aside from the two much larger jointly owned farms). But as a group they also rent 52 percent of the total acreage they operate (see Table 1), the area per farmer ranging up to 800 acres, so that the operating units average 376 acres. Renting additional acreage serves as a substitute for expanded land ownership. It is a mechanism to achieve the scale required to increase the profitability of their farming operations. Renting land is also a means of providing flexibility for adjusting to changes in the age of the farm operator and changes over time in the family labor supply.

(insert Table 1 about here)

Those renting do so on a cash or share rent basis. Two examples of share renting are cited:

1) Farmer LY rents 350 acres of land for growing grain from a white landowner on a 60/40 percent basis; i.e., the landowner furnishes the land and pays 40 percent of the fertilizer and other expenses, and the renter pays 60 percent of the cash expenses and supplies the machinery and labor. The crop is divided in the same proportion.

2) Farmer ES rents 85 acres from a white landowner on a two-thirds/one-third basis; i.e., the landowner furnishes the land and one-third of all cash expenses, and the crop is divided in the same proportion.

The amount of capital needed to maintain and operate these farms profitably has required borrowing money for operating expenses. For this purpose most of these farmers borrow (or borrowed) from the Farmers Home Administration or local banks. Others use (or have used) a Production Credit Association, their father, or other private lenders. These farmers reported using local banks more for operating expenses than for mortgage credit for buying land. Some had found it necessary in past years to work off-farm so as to have sufficient operating capital. A few of them now try to cover operating expenses without borrowing.

Managerial skills and commitment to learn

Studies have found that better-trained farm operators and managers are more likely to be innovators and are more capable of adjusting efficiently and profitably to the rapid changes occurring in agriculture than are the low skilled (King, 1977). Thus, a widely held notion today is that a farmer's level of formal schooling gives some indication of his level of managerial skills and/or his ability to acquire these skills.

The educational levels of these selected farmers range from a low of fourth grade to a high of three years of college. Most of them went into farming independently with ordinary skills acquired from prior experience. All of them, with one exception, had grown up on farms. Two of them had agricultural training at the high school level, and two had such training in college. While some relied heavily in their beginning years on experience (trial and error), all of them have to some extent sought assistance and institutional support to improve their managerial abilities, and, in turn, to make profits beyond a bare subsistence.

Although it was not our purpose to measure these farmers' level of managerial skills in relation to their level of education, we are of the opinion that they are, in general, keenly aware of the need to know and to use modern technology in their agricultural practices, and they are committed to learn. In expressing his views of what it takes to become a successful farmer, CD (with 4 years of school completed) remarked,

> "You also have to keep up with the modern techniques and changes too. For example, weed control--because you can't get anybody to go out there with a hoe anymore to chop it. . . . The Extension Service is the place to start. If the county agent doesn't know it, he will find out and bring the information to me. . . . It's best to talk to the county agent, because nine times out of ten he has the information needed on loans, equipment, chemicals, etc., and he will see that you get to the programs and exhibits at the University."

These farmers tend in varying degrees to seek information and services that can help them become more efficient and productive in their farming operations. Reference here is made to those who have established

linkages with various institutions and agencies directly and indirectly related to agriculture, including: the Agricultural Experiment Stations, the Cooperative Extension Service, the Agricultural Stabilization and Conservation Service, the Soil Conservation Service, the Farmers Home Administration, and vocational agriculture programs.

The type and intensity of the communication linkages which these selected farmers have with the agricultural agencies vary from one farmer to another even within a given county and state, as well as between states. These are some examples:

1) In one county some farmers have been getting technical assistance from the Agricultural Extension Service over a long period of years, while another farmer in the same county had never received assistance from this agency--as a matter of fact, he did not know the county agent.
2) In one state some farmers received only written information from the Extension Service, while other farmers received regular farm visits both from the local county agent and from an agricultural specialist from the state 1862 land-grant university.
3) In one state farmers indicated frequent attendance at workshops and meetings at the Agricultural Experiment Station, while farmers in another state had never taken part in such educational activities.

While the overall patterns of assistance from agricultural agencies were found to be somewhat spotty and irregular, no attempt was made to determine the quality of the assistance and of existing communication linkages between these farmers and the agencies. It is fairly well known that federal agricultural programs have generally bypassed Blacks until recent years (Marshall, 1974:33-40). While these case study farmers are

receiving assistance in varying degrees-from none to some--from different agricultural agencies, their general feeling is that they have been getting better treatment since the passage of the 1964 Civil Rights Act. Farmer ND comments about his experience in selling tobacco:

> "I think integration has brought about a lot of change. . . . Ten years ago, a government grader cut the grade back after he found out it was my tobacco and I was Black. But now it doesn't make too much difference. If you've got good tobacco you get the price."

Reflecting change in these agencies, some of this selected group of farmers in recent years have served or are serving in leadership roles not traditionally performed by Blacks. One is now a member of a state ASCS committee, one has served on the county FHA advisory committee, and one has been a member of a county ASCS committee. Another is now serving on the county ASCS board, the county Soil and Water Conservation board, and the county Extension Executive Council. According to one farmer who was the lone Black on a 5-man SCS county committee, token representation is not much better than no representation unless one continues to complain. He describes it this way:

> "I was the lone Black. I was just one vote. I might as well have voted with them (the whites). All I could do was complain, and I did complain during the fuel shortage when they would not sell Blacks fuel. When we got ready to pick cotton, we could not get fuel. I complained and complained, and they corrected it."

In addition to getting assistance from governmental farm agencies, most of these farmers attend meetings, workshops, tours, and demonstrations conducted by seed, fertilizer, equipment, and chemical companies. Some also use farm journals as a source of information. Speaking of his

desire to be well informed, Farmer EN says, "I enjoy knowing what's going on, and what can be done, even though I may not be applying it."

One evidence of their management skills is that these farmers have been shifting to new types of farming enterprises over a period of years. Most have diversified their enterprises considerably (Table 2), moving away from cotton and tobacco. Some have plans for further change in the immediate future.[13]

(insert Table 2 about here)

Some of these farmers economize in their farming operations by participating in farmer cooperatives through which they buy farm supplies and, in turn, receive patronage dividends based on profits at the end of the year. One of these belongs to a small feeder pig cooperative through which he sells his swine. These selected farmers, with few exceptions, are members of the Farm Bureau. While some of them look upon this farm organization as being the "voice" for farmers, most of them look upon it as an economical means of buying insurance and farm supplies.

It was also found that a primary consideration of the case study farmers in planning their work each year, with two exceptions, is to produce an adequate food supply to feed their families. Estimates of the quantity of food produced at home ranged from 50 to 80 percent, including vegetables, fruits, milk, pork, beef, chicken, and eggs. Thus, because of prudent planning, most of these farmers are generating indirect income through home food production.

Linkages with nonfarm organizations and activities

These selected Black farmers are organization-minded. They are generally active members and leaders in church, civic, and fraternal organizations. Having a strong religious orientation, they view the

church as being the most independent institution in the Black community. Considering the role that many Black churches played during the Civil Rights Movement of the 1960s, it was not surprising to hear these landowner farmers speak of their churches as becoming increasingly involved in the secular and economic needs of the Black community. For example, in relating his leadership role in a voter registration campaign among Black farmers in his county, Farmer CD proudly remarked, "The church is the most organized group in the Black man's life." The rural church also continues to be used as a medium of disseminating information concerning agriculture. The church is viewed as being one of the most important organizations in the rural Black communities, not only because it provides a means of community expression, but because it is instrumental in mobilizing loyalties among Blacks. These selected farmers, in general, are apparently playing key leadership roles in the maintenance of these functions.

Membership in fraternal organizations is another source of strength for these successful Black farmers. Most of them belong to the Masonic Lodge, a formal organization with a long tradition in the rural community. Organized as a mutual aid group, this organization also provides opportunities for leadership development and social participation on which these farmers place high value.

All of the case study farmers vote in local, state, and national elections. Speaking freely of the hostilities they themselves experienced in registering and voting prior to the passage of the 1965 Voting Rights Act, some of the farmers in the South reported active participation in the civil rights movement of the 1960s. Farmer CD, for example,

proudly reminisced of his marching at the head of the line with the late Martin Luther King in Montgomery, Alabama, and also about his bailing young Blacks out of jail because of their participation in the marches and demonstrations. Moreover, he worked throughout his county's farming communities conducting workshops in rural churches and urging other Blacks to register and vote. These farmers value political participation as being just as important to Blacks as their religion. Like farmer CD, the other case study farmers seem to be strongly committed to setting an example for other Blacks in their communities by themselves actively participating in the political process.

Family goals and supports

The selected farmers are at different stages of the family life cycle. Their ages range from 36 to 76 years. There is extreme variation in the ages of their children, who number from none to ten.

It was pointed up earlier that the formal education of this group of farmers is generally limited. Most of them knew from experience the handicaps of being uneducated and Black, and they did not want their children to suffer the hardships that they had had to endure. Determined to provide their children with a better head start, they felt that an investment in the education of their children was far more important and would have more lasting dividends than an equal investment in improving or expanding their farming operations. Some borrowed money and further mortgaged their farms to help finance their children's education; others took off-farm work to add to the family income.

That their high educational aspirations for their children have generally been met is evidenced by the educational attainments of these

children. Among their offspring one finds teachers, government employees, lawyers, nurses, secretaries, skilled laborers, and a daughter in training now to become a doctor. Thus, these farmers take a great deal of pride in the social standing of their children even though the bulk of them are now living in the North or in urban centers in the South. For most of them, however, one consequence of realizing high educational aspirations for their children has been to reduce the probability that any of the children will be farmers. The exception, as we will note in a subsequent section on "Prognosis for the Future," is found in the instances where the children are being reared in a social, economic, and political milieu more favorable than that which prevailed in the South before the Civil Rights movement of the 1960s.

The mention of family cohesion--"You and your wife have to be in one accord; the wife and husband have to be together to be a successful farmer"--and help on the farm from wife and children are further evidence of the importance of family support.

Perception of differences between successful white farmers and successful Black farmers

All of the selected farmers were asked, "Is there any difference between a successful white farmer and a successful Black farmer?" Their responses were varied, but dominant themes were expressed. Farmer LE focused on unequal opportunities in obtaining credit:

> "There's a great difference between them. . . . The Black farmer can't go to the bank and borrow the noney that the white farmer can borrow. . . . At the time I was trying to get started in farming, a white man in my community who had not made the progress in farming that I had could go to the bank and borrow money, twice as much as I

could. I would go to borrow it and they would say they didn't have it. They wouldn't let me have it. But they would let him have it."

Farmer LY is of the opinion that there is no difference between a successful white farmer and a successful Black farmer except that their starting points may have been different:

"Some white farmers are successful because they had a fortune given to them to start with. But most Black farmers who are successful did it the hard way. They've worked for it. That's been my situation. I've worked for what little I have."

Farmer CD feels that white farmers may take greater risks than Black farmers:

"A white farmer doesn't mind continuing to reach out and go farther and farther in debt. A Black farmer like myself does not want to go deep in debt."

Farmer EL is of the opinion that parental support and access to getting information may be the difference between a successful white farmer and a successful Black farmer, as he replies:

"The successful white farmer in most instances has had help of all kinds--encouragement from his parents and access to all kinds of information, more so than Blacks--and in most cases he has had the chance to get help from sources that Blacks wouldn't ordinarily know about. So when a Black has been successful in farming, you can just bet that he has done a lot for himself and by himself that made him stand there and come to success."

Farmer EE includes formal training:

"The white farmer has taken agriculture in high school. His father

encouraged him so as to put him on top. . . . The successful Black farmer has to have twice as much push because he doesn't have as much capital as the white farmer."

Certain disparities emerge or are implied in the foregoing viewpoints regarding the differences between successful white farmers and successful Black farmers. They reflect some crucial areas which the selected farmers apparently perceive as having impeded the success of Black farmers, namely: (1) unequal opportunity in obtaining credit, (2) constraints on the starting point in farming, (3) greater risk-avoidance, (4) lack of or limited parental support, (5) limited access to information, (6) lack of training, and (7) limited capital.

Prognosis for the future for Black farmers

Farming and independent landholding have not lost their appeal for these selected farmers. Under the present conditions, however, they generally have mixed feelings about the future of Blacks in farming. Some are hopeful, others are only cautiously optimistic. Some illustrative comments follow.

"Since the Civil Rights movement of the 1960s, all of us learned so much that we didn't know about, and the colored people have gotten to the point where they can get just about what they want, or just about what they are able to get--I mean if they have collateral. . . . The future looks better than the past."

Farmer EE sees a future for Black farmers in agriculture, but he feels that capital will be an obstacle for the average Black. Lack of capital, he feels, discourages Blacks from entering farming. EE holds that Blacks lost interest in farming years ago because they got tired of

working for nothing when they were working on shares.

Farmer ND thinks there is a future for Black farmers if they are willing to sacrifice and work. However, he feels it is still easier for whites to get assistance than Blacks. In his opinion, Black farmers will have to be dedicated and work twice as hard as whites to be successful, and he adds, "Blacks are not going to get the financial assistance that the white farmers are going to get."

Farmer TS's outlook is that there will be only a few Black farmers in the future due to (1) the rising cost of land, (2) Blacks' selling their land, and/or (3) whites' refusal to sell land to Blacks "unless it costs a fortune." In addition to land and an interest in farming, he sees credit as important, but does not see it as a problem. TS views efficiency as being related to the future of Blacks in farming:

> "There's good money in farming if you are farming right. You can get a 'double extra' living from it. This doesn't mean playing around running rabbits and shooting squirrels. 'Double extra' means . . . having some money in layaway. There's a good living in farming. I'm glad I stuck with it."

Farmer ME's outlook for Black farmers in the future is good, providing they can get the money needed for land and equipment. He explains:

> "A man's chances of becoming a farmer are pretty slim if he has to buy everything all the way. He can't start out without anything. If he has something, it is possible. People going into farming must have enough land to justify their farming, and it's hard to do anything now just on a small scale."

When probed for an explanation as to why young Blacks tend not to enter farming, farmer CD (age 65), who only has daughters, replied without hesitation:

> "Most Black children who grow up on the farm get an education and leave. Few Black children take up agriculture. . . . If I had a boy, I would have started him off in the farming business by giving him a tract of cotton, letting him sell it and use the money. I'd see to it that he put it [the money] in the right place--you'd have to keep control over that--but let him always have some money, let him make money on his own. If it's cattle, give him 7 or 8 and tell him they're his. See to it that you get him interested and he'd probably come up liking to farm, especially if he sees there's money in it as there is in anything else."

It is important to these farmers that the land they own be kept in the family for succeeding generations. But their general prognosis about the future for Blacks in farming is more favorable than is the likelihood that their own farms will remain in the family. Four of the 13 had only daughters (two of these families, however, were still in the child-bearing stage), one had no children. The remaining nine, including one who had only an adopted child, were asked if any of their sons wished to become farmers. Only two responded in the affirmative.

A retired farmer, aged 76, who has seven sons regrets that none of them chose farming as an occupation, but he doesn't blame young folk who have known farm life as drudgery and who have elected to pursue a better quality of life in nonfarm areas. He offers this explanation:

"Along the time when we were farming, times were pretty hard. We could barely meet our obligations. As the children grew up, the older they got, they wanted a share for themselves. We would give them a share. Then things got out of hand, and they decided among themselves that after graduating from high school they could get a job and make a better living. After they got off and started public work, . . . they'd rather do that than farm."

In contrast, a farmer in his forties feels that all three of his sons want to be farmers. One son recently graduated from college with a major in biology. Another completed a welding course at a local Technical Institute, while the third is a senior at the state land-grant university, where he is majoring in agriculture. When asked what motivated his sons' interest in farming, this farmer conveyed a high degree of assurance in his reply:

"Well, I imagine because I try to make things so convenient for them here on the farm. And what money we make, we spend it together [farmer's emphasis]. I just don't do like a lot of parents--take it all for myself and don't let them [the children] have any at all. So we work together and we try to fix things convenient so they don't have much reason to want to go anywhere else to work. I think that makes a lot of difference. And we get along together just about like brothers instead of--you know--father and son."

Discussion

The Black farmers selected for the case studies, chosen because they had achieved what agricultural professionals and the farmers themselves perceived as success, have diverse geographic locations. They

are a heterogeneous group from the standpoint of type and scale of farming, land holdings, age, level of schooling, type of family, etc. All own land. The variables which emerged as common denominators in the experiences of these farmers can serve as hypotheses for further study and as lessons for other present and future Black farmers.

Largely the sons of farmers, these selected farmers had practical agricultural experience and personal capacity but few material resources when they started out. Their present level of success is in some measure related to their ability to convert assets of one type into assets of another. Conceptually, variables presented in the case studies may well be categorized as resources, assets and liabilities, as used by James Coleman (1971:4):

> "The term resources describes resources that are either ends in themselves or means to an end. I sometimes use the term assets when referring to resources that are means toward the production of other resources. Liabilities are negative assets, which impede the development of resources."

In analyzing the case studies, at least two liabilities stand out, namely, generally low levels of formal education and racial discriminatory practices among agricultural agencies and related institutions. How did they deal with these liabilities, or how were they reduced? (1) Through hard-nosed determination and a strong commitment to farming, these farmers were able to overcome some of their deficiencies in formal education and agricultural training by securing technical assistance and information from federal agricultural agencies; commercial fertilizer, seed and equipment dealers; farm journals; and other farmers. (2) While racial discrimination in farm programs served as a negative factor in impeding their early start in farming, these farmers generally feel that

some improvements have been made since the Civil Rights movement of the 1960s and the passage of the 1964 Civil Rights Act.

The chief economic resource of these farmers is the land that they own; others include land rented, machinery and equipment, home food production, and off-farm employment by some of the farmers and some of the wives. These economic resources constitute both resources in themselves and source of other resources. Those farmers, for example, who supplemented their farm incomes with off-farm employment to educate their children did in fact provide them with one of the greatest resources for further productivity. On the other hand, off-farm work for others was used as a source of money for improving or expanding farming operations. Another example is that ownership of machinery and equipment made it possible for most of them to expand their farming operations through renting land in addition to their own. Probably most important is that the land they own has served as their most durable economic resource in obtaining other necessary goods and services and ultimately producing a better way of life for them and their families.

Their community and organizational leadership is consistent with the notion that ownership of land goes beyond the economic values of land itself, i.e., it affects one's psychological state and gives greater security and independence. The experience of these farmers is consistent with that reported by Salamon (1971), who found that land-owning Blacks have proved to be more likely to register and vote, more likely to participate in civil rights actions, and more likely to run for office than are non-landowners. Land ownership in the rural South, in effect, confers on Blacks a measure of independence, security, and dignity, and perhaps even power.[14]

These farmers possess many non-material assets which have undoubtedly contributed to their current achievement level. Reference here is made to such personal qualities as commitment to farming, faith in the scientific approach to farming, belief in a good life from farming, determination to succeed, willingness to take risks, leadership capability, willingness to work hard, and good health. These personal qualities, along with family cohesion, have been major assets not only in achieving the farmers' economic objectives but also in their individual achievements.

In sum, our case study farmers concentrated on multiplying their resources, converted assets of one type into assets of another and worked to reduce or erase their liabilities. These selected farmers have in fact made remarkable strides to become independent and productive citizens.

Despite the persistent socioeconomic deprivation of Black farmers as a class from the period of slavery to the present time, there does exist a relatively small group who show an amazing ability to survive and attain modest prosperity. Current attitudes and the literature tend to ignore Blacks who have managed to make a good life from farming. The tendency has been to accent the negative, i.e., "Let Black farmers get out of the farming business, they are too small." This perspective suggests a rather limited knowledge and understanding of the nature of the Black experience in American agriculture, as well as of the nature of the social, economic, and political environment in which Black farmers have had to operate. Therefore, to focus on the positive may be helpful in convincing decision-makers and educators to recognize factors that society can do something about in effecting social change. Moreover, such an analysis should be helpful in yielding clues for working with young Blacks who desire to enter farming as a career.

The experience and the situation of these farmers bear upon a number of policy issues with special relevance to Blacks in agriculture, e.g., intergenerational transfer of Black-owned land, agricultural credit, institutional racism in the delivery system of federal agricultural agencies, and the place of small-scale farms. Such policy issues are being considered in the larger study of which the present paper is a part.

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Footnotes

[3]See especially Beale (1966) for national trends 1900-1959 in number of Black farm operators and for the characteristics of nonwhite-operated farms and farm operators in the South in 1959; Wadley and Lee (1974) on trends 1920-1969 in the South and characteristics; Coleman and Kim (1975) for trends 1900-1970 in Kentucky; Coleman and Hall (1976) for Alabama and Kentucky comparisons, 1900-1970, in Black farm operators; and Lewis (1976) for changes 1959-1969 in the South and for characteristics from previously unpublished 1969 Census of Agriculture data.

[4]A preliminary unpublished tabulation of the 1974 Census of Agriculture indicated that the number of Black-operated farms had further declined to 44,786.

[5]The decreases are magnified in some degree by changes made by the U.S. Bureau of the Census in the definition of a farm and by a switch, starting with the 1969 Census of Agriculture, to collecting information by mail survey. These changes have had the effect of excluding some smaller units from the count of farms. See Boxley, Lewis, and Anderson, 1974.

[6]The tenure trend and the characteristics data presented here for Black farm operators include a small number of other nonwhites.

[7]The estimate for 1976 refers to Blacks and other nonwhite persons. In the 1970 census, Blacks comprised 87 percent of the nonwhite farm population.

[8]A survey of nonwhite-owned rural land was made in the Southeast in 1960 by Boxley (1965). A Tennessee study by McGee and Boone (1976)

of Black landowners dealt with their attitudes and perceptions with respect to rural land.

[9]Salamon states that a few spot checks in Mississippi and North Carolina suggest that there may be about 30 percent more land owned by Black operators than indicated by agricultural census records. Boxley et al. (1974) asserts that the Census of Agriculture is an inadequate and perhaps misleading data source on Black land ownership, stating, "We do not have current, reliable information on black landownership in the South."

[10]Beale (1976) reports that the trend since 1910 for the average age of the self-employed in agriculture has been reversed since 1970, perhaps because of the changed attitude of farm youth toward agriculture and rural life, better profits from farming, and the entry of urban-reared youth into farming. Whether this reversal also holds for the Black self-employed in agriculture is not known because the sample data do not yield reliable statistics by race (Beale to Larson, May 28, 1977).

[11]A February 1976 Current Research Information System printout, provided by the Cooperative State Research Service, listing research in the land-grant institutions--both 1862 and 1890--and in the USDA identified by key words as pertaining to Blacks did not include any project about successful Black farmers.

[12]Federal Land Banks now loan only private funds but are supervised by the Farm Credit Administration, an independent federal agency. Long-term loans up to 40 years, secured by first mortgages, are made for up to 85 percent of the appraised value of the property. The Federal Land Banks also have a letter of agreement with the Farmers Home Administration whereby simultaneous loans may be made (Harding, 1975).

[13]Economic motives have not been the only reason for these farmers' shifting to other enterprises. Age is another factor. Farmer LE, age 71, for example, stopped producing tobacco in 1970 due to advancing age. He now produces vegetables for sale at a farmers' market and operates a wood yard in town with timber from his farm. Farmer LY, age 70, speaking of probably reducing the 350 acres of land he has been renting for grain, explained:

> "You could go out and put a lot of money and time in a crop at my age, break a bone or get hurt, which is a lot easier done now than a few years ago. So for that reason I don't care to do any more; and the high price of machinery . . . at my age, it would be foolish to buy."

[14]A decision was made at a South-wide Black landowners conference held in June 1976 at Tuskegee Institute to form a National Association of Landowners to address issues confronting Black farmers and landowners (see Brooks, 1976). The first convention was held in February 1977. The organization, whose establishment was encouraged by the nonprofit Emergency Land Fund formed in 1971, intends to provide such services for its members as land law information; legal services; capital, management and marketing information and services; and lending services. It also plans to lobby on legislation involving small landowners.

Table 1. Acreage owned, rented, and operated: Selected successful Black farmers, 1976

Farmer	Owned	Rented	Total Operated
	----------acres----------		
EN	216	--	216[a]
CD	185	200	385
LE	50	--	50
ME	700[b]	800	1,100
ES	90	85	175
LY	132	350	482
TS	189	160	349
DN	212	100	312
ND	40	400	440
EE	40	400	440
EL	400[c]	--	400
NN	185[d]	--	185
SR	290	70	360
Total acres	2,729[e]	2,565	4,894
Average operated			376

[a]EN, age 74, currently rents 130 acres out to another farmer.

[b]Farm jointly owned by brothers, with each farming a portion; farmer ME, however, individually rents 800 acres.

[c]Farm jointly owned by brothers and sisters. However, farmer EL is the sole operator of the farm.

[d]The acreage for NN applies to the time before he retired from farming. Upon retirement he sold 80 acres. He has continued to live on the remaining 105-acre farm.

[e]Includes the two farms collectively owned.

Table 2. Major farm enterprises: Selected successful Black farmers, 1976

Farmer	Enterprises[a]
EN	beef cattle, hogs
CD	beef cattle
LE	vegetable production for marketing; timber (wood yard)
ME	corn, peanuts, hogs, beef cattle
ES	corn, soybeans, hogs
LY	grain, corn, soybeans, wheat
TS	peanuts, soybeans, hogs, beef cattle, corn, timber
DN	cotton, corn, beef cattle
ND	tobacco, soybeans, corn, small grain
EE	tobacco, wheat
EL	beef cattle, timber
NN	cotton, corn, hogs[b]
SR	tobacco, soybeans, corn, hay, hogs, cows

[a]Enterprises for each farmer are listed in descending order of importance.

[b]These were the major enterprises for NN, who is now retired.